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LIFE SENTENCE FROM SANTA CRUZ

A defendant in the Santa Cruz, Dili, trials has been sentenced to life imprisonment. This is the harshest sentence passed so far against those involved in the incident.

The Judge's hammer came down. Observers at the trial appeared stunned at his decision. Yet Gregorio da Cunha Saldanha remained calm. His face showed neither fear nor despair, despite the fact that the Dili District Court had just agreed to put him away for the rest of his life, in accordance with the Public Prosecutor's demands for a life sentence.

Late on Tuesday afternoon, Gori - as he is known to his friends -even managed to be courteous as he announced his intention to appeal. 'Your Honour, members of the public prosecution team, and my most respected legal advisors, I hereby declare that I intend to appeal against the life sentence handed down against me'. Whilst he had admitted to having organised the demonstration in the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, he denied the accusation that he had masterminded the action.

Gregorio da Cunha Saldana di Pengadilan Negeri Dili

Before being accompanied by police to a prison van, 30-year-old Gregorio embraced his father and 2 siblings outside the courtroom. Out of the 8 defendants tried in relation to the bloody incident of November 12 1991, he was the most composed and stoic. When asked his reaction to the Judge's sentence, he replied, 'I have no regrets, because I know I am innocent'.

It was the legal advisors, Artidjo Alkostar and Domi Yos Atok from the Legal Aid Institute/Indonesian Bar Association team who looked stunned. 'I wouldn't have guessed that the sentence would have been as heavy as that demanded by the public prosecutor', said Artidjo. They consider Gori's sentence too heavy. Fellow demonstration organiser, Francisco Miranda Branco, for example was only sentenced by the same court to 15 years imprisonment.

On the other hand, according to the Judge, the sentence is fair. 'Being a leader and organiser of the November 12 demonstration, the loss of life is the responsibility of the accused. In addition to disgracing the Church, Gregorio also requested foreign assistance in opposing the Indonesian government', were amongst the reasons advanced by Judge Hieronymus Godang.

His feelings were shared by the public prosecutor. 'The accused has been proved to have been involved in underground activities, and of supporting anti-integration demonstrations in addition to implementing the political aspirations of the Concelho Nacional da Resistencia Maubere (CNRM), said Supardi. The CNRM or the National Council of Maubere Resistance is the resistance organisation headed by Fretilin chief Xanana Gusmao.

The public prosecutor went on to say that Gori had once established the Commissao da Resistencia Nacional dos Jovens Timorenses (The East Timorese Youth Commission of National Resistance) to greet each foreign delegation to East Timor. As a member of the Executive Committee of this group which is supported by the CNRM, Gori was instructed to mobilise the people and to demonstrate in front of a Portuguese parliamentary delegation.

Because the delegation's visit was cancelled, according to the public prosecutor, on 12 November the people were herded along to the Santa Cruz cemetery to visit the grave of Sebastiao Gomes, the anti-integration youth killed in a clash between pro- and anti-integration youths.

After graduating from Kristal Senior High School, Dili, in 1989, he worked as a civil servant in the Dili Public Hospital. At work, he obediently wore his civil service uniform and joined in with flag-raising ceremonies. After a year of work, he resigned.

The oldest of 3 children of a peasant farmer from Santa Cruz in East Dili, Gori was the family's mainstay. His father, da Cunha Saldanha, aged 70, is too old to work. 'My detention will inevitably have adverse economic consequences on my family. This constantly worries me', he said to TEMPO.

654 words

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Pages 38-39